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C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 000262

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES IRAQ WITH PRESIDENT HALONEN

REF: HELSINKI 248

CLASSIFIED BY: POL CHIEF JOHN HALL, REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

1. (C) ON MARCH 4 THE AMBASSADOR CALLED ON PRESIDENT HALONEN FOR A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF ISSUES ON THE INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL AGENDA. IRAQ WAS THE CHIEF TOPIC. THE AMBASSADOR BEGAN BY THANKING THE PRESIDENT FOR HER RECENT FIRM PUBLIC STATEMENTS THAT THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR RESOLVING THE CRISIS
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LIES WITH SADDAM, NOT WITH THE UN, THE U.S., OR OTHERS.

2. (C) THE PRESIDENT REITERATED HER BELIEF THAT IRAQI COMPLIANCE WITH UNSC RESOLUTIONS IS THE KEY TO THE PROBLEM. AT THE SAME TIME, SHE STRESSED THAT THE MAJORITY OF FINNS OPPOSE DISARMING SADDAM BY FORCE. AN ANTI-WAR PETITION SIGNED BY TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE HAD BEEN DELIVERED TO THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE DURING THE DAY-LONG DEMONSTRATIONS FEBRUARY 15. THE AMBASSADOR CONGRATULATED FINLAND ON BEING A COUNTRY THAT WELCOMES DISSENT -- AND CONGRATULATED THE FINNS ON THEIR ABILITY TO DISSENT IN AN ORDERLY WAY. THE PRESIDENT LAUGHED, "YES, WE FINNS ARE ORDERLY."

3. (C) HALONEN ALSO VOICED FINNISH CONCERN ABOUT THE AFTERMATH OF A CONFLICT, ESPECIALLY ITS EFFECT ON THE DEVELOPING NATIONS OF THE REGION. IT IS CRITICAL THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REACH OUT TO NATIONS WHERE POVERTY IS RAMPANT -- WE NEED TO FIND WAYS TO MAKE CONNECTIONS. THE PRESIDENT ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE IMPACT ON THE POLITICAL STRUCTURES OF NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES, EMPHASIZING THAT SHE WAS NOT WORRIED ABOUT IRAN. (SHE SEEMED TO BE REFERRING IN PARTICULAR TO SAUDI ARABIA.) THE AMBASSADOR SAID THE UNITED STATES IS EQUALLY CONCERNED ABOUT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STABILITY, BOTH WITHIN IRAQ AND IN THE REGION, AND WAS COMMITTED TO A VISION OF A FUTURE OF HOPE FOR ALL OF THE MIDDLE EAST. IN THIS CONNECTION, WE APPRECIATE FINLAND'S PUBLICLY-STATED WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE IN RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ, WITH HUMANITARIAN AID AND PEACEKEEPERS.

4. (C) THE PRESIDENT ASKED WHETHER THE AMBASSADOR THOUGHT A CONFLICT WAS INEVITABLE. THE AMBASSADOR SAID SHE HAD
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OBSERVED THAT DIPLOMATS OFTEN ANSWER A QUESTION WITH A QUESTION. FOLLOWING THAT MODEL, SHE ASKED WHETHER THE PRESIDENT THOUGHT SADDAM HAD ANY INTENTION OF FULLY DISARMING. IT SEEMS HISTORY IS REPEATING ITSELF: IF HE DID NOT HONOR THE FIRST UNSC RESOLUTION ON IRAQ, WHAT IS THE CHANCE THAT HE WILL HONOR THE EIGHTEENTH?

5. (C) THE PRESIDENT AND THE AMBASSADOR ALSO BRIEFLY DISCUSSED HALONEN'S BUSY SCHEDULE OF INTERNATIONAL VISITS OVER THE PAST YEAR. PRESIDENT HALONEN SAID AGAIN HOW MUCH SHE APPRECIATED PRESIDENT BUSH'S MEETING WITH HER LAST APRIL, AND THANKED THE AMBASSADOR FOR HELPING ARRANGE THE VISIT, ALONG WITH CALLS ON JUSTICE O'CONNOR AND SENATOR HELMS. IT IS CLEAR HALONEN IS ALSO STILL THINKING ABOUT HER VISIT TO CHINA LAST NOVEMBER. SHE SAID THAT FOR MANY NATIONS THE FUTURE LIES IN WORKING WITH CHINA. STILL THERE REMAINS MUCH FOR THE CHINESE TO DO IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD. SHE NOTED THAT SHE HAD BEEN CRITICIZED FOR NOT TAKING A STRONGER STANCE ON THIS ISSUE DURING HER VISIT. THE AMBASSADOR SAID THE SAME APPLIES TO IRAQ -- WHO HAS BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE IRAQI PEOPLE? WHERE IS THE INTERNATIONAL OUTRAGE OVER THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY SADDAM AGAINST HIS OWN PEOPLE?

6. (C) COMMENT: WE ARE STRUCK BY HOW MUCH MORE MODERATE PRESIDENT HALONEN'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS ARE TODAY THAN EVEN TWO YEARS AGO. ALTHOUGH FINLAND REMAINS A NON-ALIGNED NATION -- AND MANY FINNS REMAIN OUTRIGHT PACIFISTS -- HALONEN HAS MADE CLEAR IN A HIGH-PROFILE WAY HER VIEW THAT THE HEAT MUST BE KEPT ON SADDAM. IN DECEMBER SHE AND PM LIPPONEN TOGETHER APPROVED FINLAND'S PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO AIDING IN
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POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ, AT A TIME WHEN NOT THAT MANY NATIONS HAD COME FORWARD WITH SUCH A COMMITMENT. TO SOME EXTENT, SHE IS PROBABLY TRYING TO CLOSE RANKS WITH LIPPONEN, SINCE ELECTIONS ARE IMMINENT (MARCH 16). AND LIPPONEN HAS INDEED MADE USE OF HER STATEMENTS, ANSWERING OPPOSITION CRITICISM OF FINLAND'S IRAQ STANCE BY SAYING HIS

GOVERNMENT IS IN LINE WITH THE PRESIDENT'S POLICY (REFTEL).
MCELVEEN-HUNTER